

Monte Vista grad carries on family tradition

IF YOU'RE A MOM, you worry about your children. Are they safe? When will they return home? Who are they hanging out with? That's just part of the territory, folks.

For Alamo resident Vicki Carlson, her worries were multiplied last spring and she had concerns other moms may never face.

She wasn't sure if her son Brian was safe, and didn't know when he was returning home. However, she did know whom he was hanging out with. He was part of a group of young men assigned to Army artillery as a multilaunch rocket crew member. Brian's unit was among the first to enter Iraq from Kuwait during the first days of the war.

"It's certainly a concern when your child is in the middle of fighting a war but I was comforted to know that he was a member of the best-trained Army in the world," said Vicki.

Brian, a 2000 Monte Vista graduate, joined the Army in October 2001, shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. He had always been interested in his relatives' stories about serving in WWII and the Korean War. His grandfather was a pilot. One uncle had been a prisoner of war in Germany. Another uncle is a colonel in the Army stationed at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pa.

"Brian was always intrigued listening to all the relatives and he was moving in the direction of carrying on the family tradition and honor of joining the Army. When the criminal act of 9/11 happened, he made his decision quickly," said Vicki.

He was deployed to Germany in April 2002, then to Iraq in March of this year. When Brian took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test, little did he know he passed so high the U.S. Military Academy at West Point would take notice. In November, Brian was invited to apply to West Point while he was stationed in Germany.

"He received an application, and after filling it out and writing four essays, receiving recommendations from his commanding officers, taking a rigorous physical agility and medical test, he sent his application off. Of course it goes without saying, we are extremely proud of Brian," said Vicki.

While in Iraq, Brian received an admissions offer from the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School. On July 11, he began at the school, which is in Fort Monmouth, N.J. If he's successful there, Brian will enter West Point next year.

Vicki said there are 209 young men and women in the class of 2004, only 54 of whom are active Army members like Brian. The other classmates are recent high school graduates who the Army believes have the qualities necessary for success at West Point. Brian came home in June for leave and to prepare for school.

Throughout the difficult time Brian was in Iraq, Vicki drew comfort from the group known as Blue Star Moms, which she joined when Brian first joined the Army.

"This is a group of wonderful and supportive women who all have children serving in the military. They got me through the bad times when I worried about Brian and his chosen career. It was very difficult to maintain a normal life while your child is placing his life in danger in his chosen calling.

"These women provided a safe place to voice my concerns and pride in his commitment. We laughed together, cried together, worried together and were proud together. The support of the group was invaluable and it goes on. Lots of our young men and women are still in harm's way and we strive to support them in every way we can," said Vicki.

She talked about the most recent Blue Star Mom project, which was to ask for reduced air fares for the military.

"Many of our young men and women are having to pay the highest airfare rates for their trips home on leave due to today's uncertain military situation. They are having to deal with canceled leaves, short notice leaves and emergency returns due to current world situations. This results in their having to pay the highest rates for their air tickets," said Vicki.

The moms have gotten help from Congress, including Reps. Ellen Tauscher, D-Alamo, and Mike Honda, D-San Jose. They helped insert wording into a House aviation bill that would urge airlines to give military personnel a break on airfare.

The bill has been passed by the House and is in the Senate. For more information, visit: www.bluestarmoms.org.

God bless our troops! Have a great week!

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